
TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE....

A Column on Consumer Issues
by Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem's
Consumer Protection and Antitrust Division

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MAIL-IN PRODUCT REBATES

Rebate offers can be irresistible to consumers, slashing the price of consumer goods at the time of purchase or promising partial or full reimbursements after the purchase. Some rebates are instant, given at the time of the sale; however the most common type of rebate is the mail-in rebate. To get these rebates, you must play the game and follow the rules.

Mail-in rebates require consumers to pay the full cost of an item at the time of purchase, and then they must send in documentation to the manufacturer or retailer to receive the rebate by mail. The documentation generally required includes the original sales receipt, UPC code, rebate slip and the consumer's name, address, and telephone number. In most cases, this paperwork must be sent to the manufacturer or retailer within 30 days of the purchase. It takes about 12 weeks before the consumer actually receives their rebate. By law, companies are required to send rebates within the time frame promised, or if no time is specified, within a 'reasonable' time. 'Reasonable' in this case often is interpreted as within 30 days.

Here are tips to follow when completing the paperwork for a mail-in rebate:

- Follow the instructions on the rebate form and enclose all required documentation in the envelope when filing for a rebate.
- Make a copy of all paperwork to be mailed when applying for a rebate. It's the only record a consumer will have of the transaction if anything goes wrong.
- Get a receipt from the post office. It will cost you a few dollars, but if you send it certified mail, you will have documentation that the rebate was sent and on what date it was received.
- Mark your calendar when you expect to get the money.
- Check your mail carefully. Many rebate checks are discarded because they come in unmarked envelopes that look like credit card applications or some other junk mail.
- Contact the company if the rebate doesn't arrive within the time promised. Even if the rebate was issued by the manufacturer, the store itself might have to pay.
- If the rebate never arrives or arrives late, file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission or the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division.

The rebate game is not always a sure win. Sometimes companies experience financial problems resulting in difficulty coming up with the money to provide the rebates. Some companies use a third party to provide the rebates, and if the company fails to timely pay the third party, the third party may not send out the rebates. In some cases, the

consumers do not follow the directions properly or fail to provide the requested documentation.

Know your rights, and follow instructions carefully. Keep copies of everything and be persistent. If you do, you will increase the odds eventually get your rebate money.

The Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division investigates allegations of fraud in the marketplace. Investigators also mediate individual complaints against businesses. If you have a consumer problem or question, call the Consumer Protection Division at 328-3404, toll-free at 1-800-472-2600, or 1-800-366-6888 (w/TTY). This article and other consumer information is located on our website at www.ag.state.nd.us.

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